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THE
PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

GREEN'S THEORY OF THE MORAL MOTIVE.

A SOMEWHAT peculiar difficulty seems to attend the discussion of ethical theory, on account of its characteristic relation to action. This relation gives rise, on one side, to the belief that ethics is primarily an 'art.' Ethics is so much the theory of practice that it seems as if its main business were to aid in the direction of conduct. This being premised, the next step is to make out of ethics a collection of rules and precepts. A body of rigid rules is erected with the object of having always some precept which will tell just what to do. But, on the other side, it is seen to be impossible that any body of rules should be sufficiently extensive to cover the whole range of action; it is seen that to make such a body results inevitably in a casuistry which is so demoralizing as to defeat the very end desired; and that, at the best, the effect is to destroy the grace and play of life by making conduct mechanical. So the pendulum swings to the other extreme; it is denied that ethics has to deal primarily or directly with the guidance of action. Limited in this way, all there is left is a metaphysic of ethic:—an attempt to analyze the general conditions under which morality is possible; to determine, in other words, the nature of that universe or system of things which permits or requires moral action. The difficulty, then, is to find the place intermediate between a theory general to the point of abstractness, a theory which provides no help to action, and a theory which attempts to further action but does so at the expense of its spontaneity and breadth. I do not

know of any theory, however, which is quite consistent to either point of view. The theory which makes the most of being practical generally shrinks, as matter of fact, from the attempt to carry out into detail its rules for living ; and the most metaphysical doctrine commonly tries to show that at least the main rules for morality follow from it. The difficulty is imbedded in the very nature of the science ; so much so that it is far easier for the school which prides itself upon its practicality (generally the utilitarian) to accuse the other (generally the 'transcendental') of vagueness than to work out any definitely concrete guidance itself ; and easier for the metaphysical school to show the impossibility of deducing any detailed scheme of action from a notion like that of seeking the greatest quantity of pleasures than for it to show how its own general ideal is to be translated out of the region of the general into the specific ; and, of course, all action is specific.

The difficulty is intrinsic, I say, and not the result of any mere accident of statement. Ethics is the theory of action and all action is concrete, individualized to the last ell. Ethical theory must have, then, a similar concreteness and particularity. And yet no body of rules and precepts, however extensive and however developed its casuistic, can reach out to take in the wealth of concrete action. No theory, it is safe to say, can begin to cover the action of a single individual for a single day. Is not, then, the very conception of ethical theory a misconception, a striving for something impossible ? Is there not an antimony in its very definition ?

The difficulty, it may be noticed, is no other and therefore no more impossible to solve than that involved in all application of theory to practice. When, for example, a man is to build a tunnel, he has to do something quite specific, having its own concrete conditions. It is not a tunnel in general which he has to make, but a tunnel having its own special end and called for by its own set of circumstances — a set of circumstances not capable of being precisely duplicated anywhere else in the world. The work has to be done under conditions imposed by the given environment, character of soil, facility of access to machinery,

and so on. It is true that so many tunnels have now been built for similar ends and under *substantially* like circumstances, that the example errs on the side of excessive mechanicalness; but we have only to imagine the tunnel building under untried special conditions, as, say, the recent engineering below the St. Clair River, to get a fair case. Now in such a case it is requisite that science, that theory, be available at every step of the undertaking, and this in the most detailed way. Every stage of the proceeding must, indeed, be absolutely controlled by scientific method. There is here the same apparent contradiction as in the moral case; and yet the solution in the case of the engineering feat is obvious. Theory is used, not as a set of fixed rules to lay down certain things to be done, but as a tool of analysis to help determine what the nature of the special case is; it is used to uncover the reality, the conditions of the matter, and thus to lay bare the circumstances which action has to meet, to synthesize. The mathematical, the mechanical, the geological theory do not say "Do this or that"; but in effect they do say, use me and you will reduce the complex conditions of which you have only some slight idea to an ordered group of relations to which action may easily adjust itself in the desired fashion. Now these conceptions of mechanics, of geology, which aid in determining the special facts at hand, are themselves, it is to be noticed, simply the *generic* statement of these same facts; the mathematics are the most general statement of any group of circumstances to be met anywhere in experience; the geology is a general statement of the conditions to be met with wherever it is an affair of the soil and so on. The theory, in other words, is not a something or other belonging to an entirely different realm from the special facts to be mastered. It is an outline statement of these same facts wrought out from previous like experiences and existing ready at hand to anticipate, and thus help solve, any particular experience. What we have then in this application of theory to the special case, with all its wealth of concrete detail, is the attack and reduction of a specific reality through the use of a general precedent idea of this same reality. Or what we have, putting it from the side of

the theory, is a general conception which is so true to reality that it lends itself easily and almost inevitably to more specific and concrete statement, the moment circumstances demand such particularization. So far as the theory is 'false,' so far, that is, as it is not a statement, however general, of the facts of the case, so far, instead of lending itself to more specific statement, instead of fertilizing itself whenever occasion requires, it resists such specification and stands aloof as a bare generality. It neither renders individual experiences luminous, nor is fructified by them, gathering something from them which makes its own statement of reality somewhat more definite and thus more ready for use another time.

Now let us return to our moral case. The same law holds here. Ethical theory must be a general statement of the reality involved in every moral situation. It must be action stated in its more generic terms, terms so generic that every individual action will fall within the outlines it sets forth. If the theory agrees with these requirements, then we have for use in any special case a tool for analyzing that case ; a method for attacking and reducing it, for laying it open so that the action called for in order to meet, to satisfy it, may readily appear. The theory must not, on one hand, stand aloof from the special thing to be done, saying, "What have I to do with thee? Thou art empirical and I am the metaphysics of conduct," nor must it, on the other hand, attempt to lay down fixed rules in advance exhausting all possible cases. It must wait upon the instruction that every new case, because of its individuality, its uniqueness, carries with it ; but it must also bring to this special case such knowledge of the reality of all action, such knowledge of the end and process involved in all deeds, that it translates naturally into the concrete terms of this special case. If, for example, I object to the categorical imperative of Kant, or the pleasure of the Hedonist, that it does not assist practice, I do not mean that it does not prescribe a rigid body of fixed rules telling just what to do in every contingency of action ; I mean that the theory so far comes short as a statement of the character of all moral action that it does not lend itself to uncovering, to getting at

the reality of specific cases as they arise ; and that, on the other hand, these special cases, not being the detailed exhibition of the same reality that is stated generally in the theory, do not react upon the theory and fructify it for further use.¹

These remarks are introductory to a critical consideration of the theory of Thomas Hill Green regarding the moral motive or ideal. His theory would, I think, be commonly regarded as the best of the modern attempts to form a metaphysic of ethic. I wish, using this as type, to point out the inadequacy of such metaphysical theories, on the ground that they fail to meet the demand just made of truly ethical theory, that it lend itself to translation into concrete terms, and thereby to the guidance, the direction of actual conduct. I shall endeavor to show that Green's theory is not metaphysical in the only possible sense of metaphysic, such general statement of the nature of the facts to be dealt with as enables us to anticipate the actual happening, and thereby deal with it intelligently and freely, but metaphysical in the false sense, that of a general idea which remains remote from contact with actual experience. Green himself is better than his theory, and engages us in much fruitful analysis of specific moral experience, but, as I shall attempt to show, his theory, taken in logical strictness, admits of no reduction into terms of individual deeds.

Kant's separation of the self as reason from the self as want or desire, is so well known as not to require detailed statement. That this separation compels the moral motive to be purely formal, having no content except regard for law just as law needs no exposition. So far as I know it has not been pointed out that Green, while arguing against such separation of sense and reason, on the ground that we cannot know sense or desire at all except as determined by reason, yet practically repeats the dualism of Kant in slightly altered form. For the conception of action determined by the pure form of self, Green simply substitutes action determined by the self in its unity ; for conduct determined by mere appetite, he substitutes con-

¹ In the *International Journal of Ethics*, for January, 1891, I have developed this thought at greater length in an article upon *Moral Theory and Practice*.

duct determined by the self in some particular aspect. The dualism between reason and sense is given up, indeed, but only to be replaced by a dualism between the end which would satisfy the self as a unity or whole, and that which satisfies it in the particular circumstances of actual conduct. The end which would satisfy the self as unity is just as far from the end which satisfies the self in any special instance of action, as, in Kant's system, the satisfaction of pure reason is remote from the satisfaction of mere appetite. Indeed, we may go a step further, and say that the opposition is even more decided and intrinsic in Green than in Kant. It is at least conceivable, according to Kant, that in some happy moment action should take place from the motive of reason shorn of all sensuous content and thus be truly moral. But in no possible circumstance, according to Green, can action satisfy the whole self and thus be truly moral. In Kant the discrepancy between the force which appetite exercises, and the controlling force at the command of pure reason, is so great as to make very extraordinary the occurrence of a purely moral action; but at least there is no intrinsic impossibility in the conception, however heavy the odds against its actual happening. In Green, however, the thing is impossible by the very definition of morality. No thorough-going theory of total depravity ever made righteousness more impossible to the natural man than Green makes it to a human being by the very constitution of his being, and, needless to say, Green does not allow the supernatural recourse available to the Calvinist in the struggle for justification.

Let me now justify, by reference to Green, this statement that according to him the very conditions under which moral action is carried on make it impossible for a satisfactory moral action to occur. Green's analysis of the moral procedure is as follows: The difference between animal and moral action is that the animal deed simply expresses a want which impels the animal blindly forward to its own satisfaction. The want is not elevated into consciousness; that is, there is no conception of the end sought. The impulse which makes good the want is not brought into the focus of consciousness; that is, there

is no conception of the nature of the means to be used in satisfying the want. Moral action arises, not through the intervention of any new kind of 'nature' or want, but through the intervention of a self which reflects upon the existing wants, and through the reflection transforms them into ends or ideals conceived as satisfying the self. The self in seeing the want, in becoming conscious of it, objectifies the want, making out of it an ideal condition of itself in which it expects to find satisfaction. It is an animal thing to be simply moved by the appetite for food ; it is a moral thing to become conscious of this appetite, and thereby transform the bare appetite into the conception of some end or object in which the self thinks to find its own satisfaction.¹

The process of moral experience involves, therefore, a process in which the self, in becoming conscious of its want, objectifies that want by setting it over against itself ; distinguishing the want from self and self from want. As thus distinguished, it becomes an end or ideal of the self. Now this theory so far might be developed in either of two directions. The self-distinguishing process may mean the method by which the self specifies or defines its own activity, its own satisfaction ; all particular desires and their respective ends would be, in this case, simply the systematic content into which the self differentiated itself in its progressive expression. The particular desires and ends would be the modes in which the self relieved itself of its abstractness, its undeveloped character, and assumed concrete existence. The ends would not be *merely* particular, because each would be one member in the self's activity, and, as such member, universalized. The unity of the self would stand in no opposition to the particularity of the special desire ; on the contrary, the unity of the self and the manifold of definite desires would be the synthetic and analytic aspects of one and the same reality, neither having any advantage metaphysical or ethical over the other. Such is *not* the interpretation Green gives. The self does not, according to him, define itself *in* the special desire ; but the self distinguishes itself *from* the

¹ See, for example, Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, pp. 92, 118, 126, 134, and 160.

desire. The objectification is not of the self *in* the special end; but the self remains behind setting the special object over against itself as not adequate to itself. The self-distinction gives rise, not to a progressive realization of the self in a system of definite members or organs, but to an irreconcilable antithesis. The self as unity, as whole, falls over on one side; as unity, it is something not to be realized in any special end or activity, and therefore not in any possible series of ends, not even a *progressus ad infinitum*. The special desire with its individual end falls over on the other side; by its contrast with the unity of the self it is condemned as a forever inadequate mode of satisfaction. The unity of the self sets up an ideal of satisfaction for itself as it withdraws from the special want, and *this* ideal set up through negation of the particular desire and its satisfaction constitutes the moral ideal. It is forever unrealizable, because it forever negates the special activities through which alone it might, after all, realize itself. The moral life is, by constitution, a self-contradiction. Says Green: "As the reflecting subject traverses the series of wants, which it distinguishes from itself while it presents their filling as its object, there arises the idea of a satisfaction on the whole—an idea never realizable, but forever striving to realize itself in the attainment of a greater command over means to the satisfaction of particular wants."¹ Green shows that the process of our active experience demands that the self, in becoming conscious of a want, set that want before itself as an object, thus distinguishing itself from the want; but he shows us no road back from the want thus objectified to the self. The unity of self has efficiency only in a negative way, to set itself up as an ideal condemning to insufficiency every concrete step towards reaching the ideal. The self becomes, not a systematic reality which is (or which may be) realizing itself in every special deed, but a far-away ideal which can be realized only through an absolute exhaustion of all its capacities. "Of a life of complete development, of activity with the end attained, we can only speak or think in negatives, and thus only can we speak or

¹ Prolegomena, p. 91; see also p. 233.

think of that state of being in which, according to our theory, the ultimate moral good must consist."¹

Consider, then, how much worse off we are than the animals; they can get at least the satisfaction of their particular wants, while the supervention of the self in us makes us conscious of an ideal which sets itself negatively over against every attempt to realize itself, thus condemning us to continued dissatisfaction. Speaking more accurately, the self supervenes, not completely or as an adequately compelling reality, but only as the thought of an ideal. It supervenes, not as a power active in its own satisfaction, but to make us realize the unsatisfactoriness of such seeming satisfactions as we may happen to get, and to keep us striving for something which we can never get! Surely, if Green is correct, he has revealed the illusion which has kept men striving for something which they cannot get, and, the illusion detected, men will give up the strife which leads only to dissatisfaction. Whatever may be said for an ascetic ethics, naked and professed, surely there is something at fault in the analysis which sets up satisfaction as the end, and *then* relapses into a thorough-going asceticism.

I have dwelt upon this contradiction at length, not for its own sake, but in order to emphasize the helplessness of such a theory with regard to action. It is not, I repeat, that a fixed body of precepts cannot be deduced from this conception of the moral ideal; it is that the idea cannot be *used*. Instead of being a tool which can be brought into fruitful relations to special circumstances so as to help determine what should be done, it remains the bare thought of an ideal of perfection, having nothing in common with the special set of conditions or with the special desire of the moment. Indeed, instead of helping determine the right, the satisfactory, it stands off one side and says, "No matter what you do, you will be dissatisfied. I am complete; you are partial. I am a unity; you are a fragment, and a fragment of such a kind that no amount of you and such as you can ever afford satisfaction." In a word, the ideal not only does not lend itself to specification, but it

¹ Prolegomena, p. 180; and see also pp. 189, 204, 244.

negates specification in such way that its necessary outcome, were it ever seriously adopted as a controlling theory of morals, would be to paralyze action.

The ideal of Green is thus the bare form of unity in conduct ; the form devoid of all content, and essentially excluding all proposed content as inadequate to the form. The only positive significance which it has is : whatever the moral ideal, it must at least have the form of unity. Now it seems mere tautology to urge that the mere idea of unity, no matter how much you bring it in juxtaposition with concrete circumstances, does not tell *what* the unity of the situation is, or give any aid in determining that unity ; at most it but sets the problem, saying, "Whatever the situation, seek for its unity." But Green's ideal cannot be made to go as far as this in the direction of concreteness ; his unity is so thoroughly abstract that, instead of urging us to seek for the deed that would unify the situation, it rather says that *no* unity can be found in the situation because the situation is particular, and therefore set over against the unity.

But while it seems certain to me that any attempt to make the ideal definite must, by the very nature of the case, be at the expense of logical consistency, it will be fairer to describe briefly the various ways in which Green indicates an approach to concreteness of action. These ways may be reduced to three. In the first place, the setting of the self as ideal unity with its own unrealized satisfaction over against the particular desire with its particular satisfaction, gives rise to the notion of an unconditional good, — a good absolutely, to which, therefore, every special and relative good must conform. Hence the idea of obligation, the unquestioned ought or categorical imperative. Secondly, this same contrast keeps alive in the mind, in the face of every seeming good, the conception of a better, thus preventing the mind from sinking into any ignoble acquiescence with the present and keeping it alert for improvement. Hence the idea of moral progress. And, thirdly, this absolute good with its unqualified demands for regard upon humanity has secured in the past some degree of observance,

however defective ; it has compelled man to give it some shape and body. Hence the existence of permanent institutions which hold forth the eternal good not in its abstract shape but in some concrete embodiment.

The first of these modes for giving definiteness to the ideal, and thus making it available for actual conduct, may be soon dismissed. It is, over again, only the thought of *an* ideal, except it now takes the form of a law instead of that of a good or satisfaction. It is at most the consciousness *that* there is something to do and that this something has unconditioned claims upon us. We are as far as ever from any method of translating this something in general into the special thing which has to be done in a given case. And here, as before, this unconditioned law not simply fails to carry with itself any way of getting concrete, but it stands in negative relation to any transfer into particular action. It declares : "Whatever you do, you will come short of the law which demands a complete realization ; and you can give only inadequate obedience, since your action is limited through your want at the moment of action." Given the general acceptance of the theory, the result would be, on account of the impossibility of conforming to the demands of the law, either a complete recklessness of conduct (since we cannot in any way satisfy this hard task-master, let us at least get what pleasure we can out of the passing moments) or a pessimism transcending anything of which Schopenhauer has dreamed.

I cannot see that the case stands any different with the idea of a Better. Granted that the thought of a better would arise from the opposition of a Good upon the whole to every special good, as depicted by Green, how are we to advance from this thought of *a* better to any notion of *what* that better is, either as to the prevailing tendency of life, the direction in which we are to look for improvement upon the whole, or in any special situation? The notion that there is a better, if a *mere* idea, that is, an idea not tending to define itself in this or that specific better, would be, it appears to me, hardly more than a mockery for all the guidance it would give conduct. How is

the general consciousness of a better to be brought into such relation with the existing lines of action that it will serve as an organ of criticism, pointing out their defects and the direction in which advance is to be looked for? And I think it could be shown through a logical analysis that the conception of a good which cannot be realized "in any life that can be lived by man as we know him"¹ is so far from being a safe basis for a theory of moral progress, that it negates the very notion of progress. Progress would seem to imply a principle immanent in the process and securing continual revelation and expression there. I am aware of the logical difficulties bound up in the idea of progress, but these difficulties are increased rather than met by a theory which makes it consist in advance *towards* an end which is outside the process, especially when it is added that, so far as we can know, this end cannot be reached; that indeed the nature of the process towards it is such as to make the ideal always withdraw further. The only question on such a theory is whether the thought of advance *towards* the goal has any meaning, and whether we have any criterion at all by which to place ourselves; to tell where we are in the movement, and whither we are going—backward or forward.

We come, then, to the embodiment which the ideal has found for itself in the past as the sole reliance for getting self-definition into the empty form of unity of self. In their effort towards this full realization men have produced certain institutions, codes, and recognized forms of duty. In loyalty to these, taken not merely in themselves, but as expressions of the attempt to realize the ideal, man may find his primary concrete duties. Says Green: "However meagrely the perfection, the vocation, the law, may be conceived, the consciousness that there is such a thing, so far as it directs the will, must at least keep the man to the path in which human progress has so far been made. It must keep him loyal in the spirit to established morality, industrious in some work of recognized utility."² The criticism here may take several roads. We may point out that

¹ Prolegomena, p. 189.

² Prolegomena, p. 184; see also p. 207.

the question is not whether as matter of fact the ideal *has* embodied itself in institution and code with sufficient fulness so that loyalty to the institution and code is a means in which our duty and satisfaction comes specifically home to us: that the question is whether, *if* the ideal were the abstract unity — the unity negative to every special end — which Green makes it, any such embodiment would be possible. We may ask, in other words, whether Green, in order to help out the undefinable character of his ideal, its inability to assume concrete form, has not unconsciously availed himself of a fact incompatible with his theory, a fact whose very existence refutes his theory. Or, we might approach the matter from the other side and inquire whether the relation of the absolute ideal to the special institutions in which it has found expression is of such a kind (according to the terms of Green's theory of moral experience) that loyalty to 'established morality' is a safe ethical procedure. On the contrary, must not, according to the fundamental premiss which Green has laid down, the relation of the ideal to *any* expression which it may have secured, be essentially — radically — negative? That is, does not the ideal in its remote and unrealizable nature stand off and condemn the past attempts to realize it as vain, as unworthy? Does not the ideal say, in substance, I am not in you; you are but nugatory attempts to shadow forth my unity? Such being the case, the path of morality would lie in turning *against* established morality rather than in following it. The moral command would be, "Be *not* loyal to existing institutions, if you would be loyal to me, the only true moral ideal." But this very negation, since it is a negation in general, since it negates not this or that feature of the established morality, but that morality *per se*, gives no aid in determining in what respect to act differently. It just says: "Do not do as you have been doing; act differently." And it is an old story in logic that an undetermined "infinite" negative conveys no intelligence. It may be true that a virtue is not an elephant, but this throws no light on the nature of either the virtue or the elephant. The negation must be with respect to an identity involved in both the compared terms

before it assists judgment ; that is, the ideal must be *in* the actual which it condemns, if it is to really criticise ; an external standard, just because it is external, is no standard at all. There is no common ground, and hence no basis for comparison. And thus when Green goes on to say¹ that the same ideal which has embodied itself in institutions also embodies itself in the critical judgment of individuals, who are thereby enabled to look back upon the institutions and cross-examine them, thus raising up higher standards, he says something which it is highly desirable to have true, but which cannot be true, if his theory of the purely negative relation of the unity of self-consciousness to every particular act is correct.

But we need not indulge, at length, in these various hypothetical criticisms. Green himself, with his usual candor in recognizing and stating all difficulties, no matter how hardly they bear upon his own doctrine, has clearly stated the fundamental opposition here ; an opposition making it impossible that the ideal should concretely express itself in any institutional form in such way as to lend itself to the concrete determination of further conduct. The contradiction, as Green himself states it, is that while the absolute unity of self must, in order to translate into an ideal for man, find an embodiment in social forms, all such forms are, by their very nature and definition, so limited that no amount of loyalty to the institution can be regarded as an adequate satisfaction of the ideal. Or as Green puts it : "Only through society is any one enabled to give that effect to the idea of man as the object of his actions, to the idea of a possible better state of himself, without which the idea would remain like that of space to a man who had not the senses either of sight or of touch," — that is, a merely ideal possibility, without actual meaning. And yet society necessarily puts such limits upon the individual that he cannot by his life in society give effect to the idea. "Any life which the individual can possibly live is at best so limited by the necessities of his position that it seems impossible, on supposition that a definite self-realizing principle is at work in it, that it should be

¹ Prolegomena, pp. 270 *et seq.*

an adequate expression of such a principle." "It is only so far as we are members of the society, by means of which we can conceive of the common good as our own, that the idea has any practical hold on us at all; and this very membership implies confinement in our individual realization of the idea. Each has primarily to perform the duties of his station; his capacity for action beyond the range of this duty is definitely bounded, and with it is definitely bounded also his sphere of personal interest, his character, his realized possibility." ¹

Here is the contradiction. If man were to withdraw from his social environment, he would lose at once the idea of the moral end, the stimulus to its realization, and the concrete means for carrying it out. The social medium is to the moral ideal what language is to thought—and more. And yet if man stays in the social environment, he is by that very residence so limited in interest and power that he cannot realize the ideal. It is the old difficulty over again.

Just as the unity of the self, taken psychologically, sets itself, in a negative way, over against every special desire, so this same unity of self, taken socially, removes itself from every special institution in which it is sought to embody it—removes itself, be it noticed, not because the embodiment *succeeds* and through the very thoroughness of the embodiment creates a new situation, requiring *its* special unification, but because of the essential futility of the attempt at embodiment. The antithesis between form and content, ideal and actual, is an undoubted fact of our experience; the question, however, is as to the meaning, the interpretation, of this fact. Is it an antithesis which arises *within* the process of moral experience, this experience bearing in its own womb both ideal and actual, both form and content, and also the rhythmic separation and reintegration of the two sides? Or, is the antithesis between the process of moral experience, *as such*, and an ideal outside of this experience and negative to it, so that experience can never embody it? It is because Green interprets the fact in the latter sense that he shuts himself up to an abstract ideal which unquali-

¹ Prolegomena, p. 192.

fiedly resists all specification, and which is therefore useless as an organ for our moral activity.

I have now attempted to show that Green takes the bare fact that there is unity in moral experience, abstracts that unity from experience (although its sole function is to be the unity of experience) and then, setting this unity over against the experience robbed of its significance, makes of the unity an unrealized and unrealizable ideal and condemns the experience, shorn of its unity, to continual dissatisfaction. I have tried to show this, both in general, from the nature of Green's analysis, and, more in particular, from a consideration of the three special modes in which the ideal endeavors to get relatively concrete form. Since I have treated the theory as reduced to its naked logical consistency, I may have appeared to some to have dealt with it rather harshly, though not, I hope, unjustly. But aside from the fact that the truest reverence we can render any of the heroes of thought is to use his thinking to forward our own struggle for truth, philosophy seems, at present, to be suffering from a refusal to subject certain ideas to unswerving analysis because of sympathy with the moral atmosphere which bathes those ideas, and because of the apparent service of those ideas in reclothing in philosophic form ideas endeared to the human mind through centuries of practical usefulness in forms traditional and symbolic.

In closing, I wish to point out that the abstract theories of morals, of which we have just been considering the best modern type, are not aberrations of an individual thinker; that, on the contrary, they are the inevitable outcome of a certain stage of social development, recurring at each of those nodal points in progress when humanity, becoming conscious of the principle which has hitherto unconsciously underlain its activity, abstracts that principle from the institutions through which it has previously acted preparatory to securing better organs for it—institutions, that is, through which it shall flow more freely and more fully. The error consists in transforming this purely historical opposition, an opposition which has meaning only with reference to the movement of a single process, into a rigid or

absolute separation. That is to say, at the moment in which a given cycle of history has so far succeeded that it can express its principle free from the mass of incident with which it had been bound up (and so hidden from consciousness) at that moment this principle appears in purely negative form. It is the negation of the preceding movement because in it that movement has succeeded—has summed itself up. Success always negates the process which leads up to it, because it renders that process unnecessary; it takes away from it all function and thus all excuse for being. Just so, for example, Hellenic life transcended itself in Socrates; in him it became conscious of the principle (the universality of the self, to express it roughly) which had been striving to realize itself. The movement having come to consciousness, having generalized itself, its principle at once assumed a negative relation to the forms in which this principle had been only partially embodied. Just because Socrates was, in his consciousness, a complete Greek, he wrote the epitaph of Greece. So, to take another obvious example, Jesus, in fulfilling the law, transcended it, so that those who were “in Christ Jesus, were no longer under the law.” Now just because the principle in its completion, its generalization is negative to its own partial realizations or embodiments, just because it negates its own immediate historic antecedents, it is easy to conceive of it as negative to *all* embodiment. At a certain stage of the movement, this transformation of a historic into an absolute negative is not only easy, but, as it would seem, inevitable. This stage is the moment when the principle which sums up one movement is seen to be the law for the next movement and has not as yet got organized into further outward or institutional forms. For the moment (the moment may last a century) the principle having transcended one institutional expression, and not having succeeded in getting another, seems to be wholly in the air—essentially negative to all possible realization. The very completeness with which the principle sums up and states the reality of life seems, by the one great paradox, to put it in opposition to that reality—to make of it something essentially transcending experience. The great example of this is the

fortune of the Christian idea. As it was originally stated, it was not put forth as a specially religious truth; religious, that is, in a sense which marked off religion as a sphere by itself; it was propounded as the realization of the meaning of experience, as the working truth which all experience bases itself upon and carries with itself. This truth was that man is an expression or an organ of the Reality of the universe. That, as such organ, he participates in truth and, through the completeness of his access to ultimate truth, is free, there being no essential barriers to his action either in his relation to the world or in his relations to his fellow-men. Stated more in the language of the time, man was an incarnation of God and in virtue of this incarnation redeemed from evil. Now this principle, if we regard it as having historical relations and not something intruded into the world from outside, without continuity with previous experience, this principle, I say, must have been the generalization of previous life; such a generalization as plucking its principle from that experience negated it. And yet this principle, at the outset, only quickened men's consciousness of their slaveries—this idea of participation in the Absolute only made men feel more deeply the limitations of their activity and hence their 'finitude.' Thus the principle seemed negative not only to preceding institutions but to all contemporaneous institutions; indeed, these contemporaneous institutions were, of course, only the survivals of the preceding institutions. Until such time, then, as the new principle should succeed in getting itself organized into forms more adequate to itself (the development of science, the conquest of nature through the application of this science in invention and industry, and its application to the activities of men in determining their relations to one another and the resulting forms of social organization) this principle must have seemed remote from, negative to, all possible normal life. Thus, in being forced apart from actual life, the principle was conceived, not any longer as a working method of life, but as something wholly supernatural. So absolutely was a negation which was only historic in its meaning frozen into an absolute negative.

Now the ethical theory which Green represents appears under similar historic conditions. Physical science in its advance has got to the thought of a continuous unity embodied in all natural process. In the theory of evolution this unity of process has ceased to be either a supernatural datum or a merely philosophic speculation. It has assumed the proportions of fact. So social organization has gone far enough in the direction of democracy that the principle of movement towards unity comes to consciousness in that direction. In every direction there is coming to consciousness the power of an organizing activity underlying and rendering tributary to itself the apparently rigid dualisms holding over from the mediæval structure. This unity, just because it is the manifestation of the reality realizing itself in the institutions characteristic of the past, is negative to those institutions; it is the reality of which they are the phenomena. That is, these institutions have their meaning as pointing to or indicating the organizing unity; they are the *attempts* to express it. Succeeding in their attempt at expression, they are superseded. They have realized their purpose, their function. The principle in which they have summed themselves up, in which they have executed themselves, has the floor; it has command of the scene of action. When that which is whole is come, that which is in part shall be done away. Now this principle of a single, comprehensive, and organizing unity being historically negative to its concrete conditions, to former institutions, is easily conceived as negative to all embodiment. While, in reality, we are conscious of this organizing principle only because it *is* getting concrete manifestation, only because, indeed, it *has* secured such embodiment as to appear as the directing principle or method of life, the first realization of the principle is negative; we become conscious, in the light of this organizing unity, of its *non-being*, of its still partial embodiment, of the resistances which it still has to overcome — this is, of its divided character. Translate this negation, which is a phase in every individualized movement, into a hard and fast thing, and you get an ideal set over against the actual (and the possible) experience as such. So it was with Green: only because the single

organizing unity had got expression for itself could he conceive it at all; only because it had emerged so thoroughly as the reality of all experience could he contrast it, as he did, with the particular experiences of which it was the meaning. Only because the institutions of life had through centuries of conception finally given birth to this idea as their own idea and reality, could Green use this idea to condemn those institutions. Such is the irony of all history; it so thoroughly realizes and embodies ideas that these very ideas are turned against it as its own condemnation. But the life which is going on in history, instead of accusing its children of their ungratefulness, makes use of the very ideas by which it is condemned to secure still wider revelation of its own meaning.

JOHN DEWEY.